



PRACTICE ADVICE – THE ROLES AND STRUCTURE OF FAMILY LIAISON

Those performing family liaison roles should always act with the highest degree of professionalism and integrity and carry out their duties with sensitivity.

The role of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is complex; it requires balancing the needs of the family with the requirement to gather material and preserve the integrity of the investigation, sometimes in a time-critical manner. There are many cases where the lifestyle, family, friends and associates of the victim may hold the key to identifying witnesses, suspects or other vital information. The family liaison role is, therefore, pivotal to the success of the investigation and may also be critical in maintaining the reputation of the police service.

Family liaison deployment is one of the most important aspects of an investigation. We must ensure that families are engaged in a professional and compassionate way, with respect for their beliefs and customs as far as the investigation allows. In particular, the principles set out in The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime 2015 should be a fundamental doctrine in deriving our response to family liaison deployment and our commitment to the families.

The way that family liaison is managed on a day-to-day basis should depend on the size and structure of a force, and the number of homicides, road deaths and critical incidents that each force has to deal with.

Strategic Lead for Family Liaison

It is beneficial that a senior leader who has the strategic lead for family liaison is identified by each force. This should ensure an efficient and effective management of FLOs and the appropriate deployment of FLOs to bereaved families. The strategic lead can:

- Delegate overall responsibility for the day to day management of Family Liaison Officers (FLOs)
- Be responsible for the local FLO deployment policy (including generic risk assessment and vetting status policy)
- Be responsible for the decisions that affect recruitment, assessment, suitability, welfare and wellbeing of Family Liaison
- Be responsible for victim satisfaction/evaluation and feedback from families

The strategic lead will also be responsible for establishing a structure within each force. The following structure should be considered for the day to day management of family liaison:

Family Liaison Co-Ordinator (FLC)

The Family Liaison Co-ordinator (FLC) is a single individual or a number of individuals who have overall responsibility for managing the day to day activities of family liaison on behalf of the strategic lead. The FLC role is not rank specific, and varies from force to force, with Detective Inspectors, Detective Sergeants and Police Staff performing the role. The FLC can:

- Support the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) in developing the family liaison strategy, completing the risk assessment and sourcing the appropriate family liaison officer(s)
- Assist the SIO in tasking, briefing and debriefing the FLOs
- Manage the deployments of FLOs and Family Liaison Advisors (FLAs) within a force
- Take responsibility for providing or arranging support, guidance and development opportunities for family liaison

Family Liaison Advisor (FLA)

Each local police area¹ may have a number of trained FLOs. In such circumstances, the Family Liaison Advisor (FLA) will have a number of FLOs under their supervision. The FLA will be responsible for deploying those FLOs and will report to a lead FLA or FLC. They may also support the FLC on incidents that require multiple deployments.

Family Liaison Officer (FLO)

The primary purpose of a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is that of an investigator. Their role is to gather evidence and information from the family to contribute to the investigation and preserves its integrity. The FLO also provides support and information, in a sensitive and compassionate manner and secures the confidence and trust of families. FLOs will liaise with families of victims of crime (primarily homicide), road fatality, mass fatality or other critical incident. They will ensure bereaved families are given timely information in accordance with the needs of the investigation.

Forces should ensure that they have a sufficient number of trained Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) to deploy to incidents of:

- Homicide
- Fatal road traffic collisions
- Mass fatalities
- Rail fatalities
- Critical incidents where family liaison might enhance the effectiveness of the police response

The Role Profiles for Family Liaison Co-ordinator, Family Liaison Advisor and Family Liaison Officer can be found at the College of Policing professional role profile webpage.

¹ Each force may have different structures from Boroughs, BCUs, Divisions or OCUs